

DEPARTMENT OF DEFENSE BLOGGERS ROUNDTABLE WITH COLONEL
RICHARD

SIMCOCK,
COMMANDER, REGIMENTAL COMBAT TEAM SIX VIA CONFERENCE CALL
FROM IRAQ

MODERATOR:
JACK HOLT, CHIEF, NEW MEDIA OPERATIONS, BLOGGERS ROUNDTABLE,
DEPARTMENT OF DEFENSE

TIME: 9:28 A.M. EDT

DATE: WEDNESDAY, JUNE 13, 2007

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COL. SIMCOCK: Sir, good afternoon. Colonel Rich Simcock.

MR. HOLT: Colonel Simcock. Jack Holt with DOD Bloggers Roundtable. Glad you could join us this morning, sir.

COL. SIMCOCK: John, good to talk with you.

MR. HOLT: All right, sir.

So we've got several folks on line: Charlie Quidnunc, Wizbang Podcast; and Andrew Lubin with ON Point; Mike Goldfarb with The Weekly Standard; Grim with Blackfive; and David Danello with U.S. Cav and ON Point.

So, Colonel, if you have an opening statement, we're ready when you are.

COL. SIMCOCK: Well, let me just -- I'll make it real short and give you the opportunity so you can ask me the questions you have.

But let me just say real quick that we've been over here for about six months. We took over authority of Area of Operations Raleigh back in January 24. And the experiences we've had over here have been amazingly positive. The Iraqis have really gotten on board as far as supporting the operations that we're doing over here. I'll give you a quick example, and that's the city of Fallujah, which is central within our area of operations. That city is in Iraqi battlespace. The 2nd Iraqi Brigade has responsibility for that. The brigade commander, who is a Shi'a, works shoulder to shoulder with the city chief of police, which is a Sunni. They work to provide security to the duly elected mayor, who is supported by a 20-seat city council.

Fallujah is a city that has a long history, some very deadly battles have gone on there the last four years, starting with Al-Fajr, where anyone in the city at that time was either killed or captured. The city today is nearly 400,000 in population. It is economically up and running. Commerce is an ongoing process there on a daily basis. And they're making a lot of progress there.

But I will say to you, it's still a long way from being a secure city. Still a lot of violence going on within Fallujah, but it is on the road to success, and really all it requires now is just the time that it's going to take to finally finish that.

That's a quick example of some of the successes we're having here in AO Raleigh. There's a lot more that I could talk to, and I'm sure that I can answer your questions, but I want to give the time to you so that I can address exactly what you would like to know about in my area of operation.

MR. HOLT: All right. Thank you, Colonel.

And, gentlemen, as we go through this, when you ask your question, be sure to identify yourself and your news outlet or your organization.

And, Charlie, why don't you go first.

Q Yes. Colonel, can you tell me something about your role in this group? Are you in a training role or are you in the battlespace? Tell me what your particular responsibility is.

COL. SIMCOCK: Well, it's a combination of the two. The first part of it is an active participant as coalition forces working with partners for security, and then those partners, in the case that I'm talking about, are usually Iraqi army and Iraqi police.

From a training aspect, we also work to train in both of those organizations, but we focus a lot of our training activity now with the provincial security forces that are standing up in our area. That is one area that has been able to really support the security operations that the Iraqi army is doing, the Iraqi police is doing and the coalition forces.

So it's a two-pronged action that we're taking in actually conducting security operations hand in hand, training up the security forces that are in our area of operation.

Q Okay, thanks.

MR. HOLT: Okay, Andrew.

Q Yes. Colonel, good afternoon. Andrew Lubin from ON Point. And Lieutenant, good to see you -- good to hear from you again.

Colonel, with you being -- with your men mostly being in Fallujah, what spillover are you seeing or are you getting from the current problems in the Baghdad area? Are the Shi'as trying to come out into your area?

COL. SIMCOCK: As you know that the -- the Baghdad security plan is in place. That has had a -- we're conducting surge operations.

Fallujah, equidistant, if you will, between Baghdad and Ramadi -- both of those areas on our flanks, east and west, have had a lot of success.

It -- we may be experiencing -- and I don't have numbers in front of me that would validate this, but we may be getting some spillover from both Ramadi and Baghdad, terrorists trying to go the path of least resistance, if you will.

If that's happening, these terrorists, as they come into the Fallujah area, are in for a rude surprise, because security actions here in my AO are actually stronger than they've ever been, for two reasons. One, I have more forces available to me than any of my

predecessors have ever had. And then you combine that with the activities of the Iraqi security forces -- as I was talking earlier, the Iraqi army, the Iraqi police and also the provincial security forces. If in fact what you say is happening, that -- if we're getting spillover from Baghdad or spillover from Ramadi, they're not finding an easy take here in the Fallujah area.

Q Great. Thank you very much.

COL. SIMCOCK: You're welcome.

MR. HOLT: Okay. Mike.

Q How's it going, Colonel?

COL. SIMCOCK: It's going -- (off mike).

Q I would just be curious to hear a little bit about what kind of -- since our call this morning was about strategic effects, or at least it was supposed to be, I'd be curious to hear what kind of firepower you guys are calling in on a regular basis. Are they using artillery or air power? How frequently? Or just -- if you could sort of give us a sense for what kind of engagements you guys are finding yourselves in there.

COL. SIMCOCK: As I told you, we've been here now for about six months. As we progress further, we're using less and less artillery, less and less combined air support, weapon systems, combined arms-type activity less and less; our armored assets have been pulled out of Fallujah. Engagements, if you will -- the enemy that we're fighting here, there is nothing on the ground here that a Marine rifle squad can't quickly take care of. If they stand up and fight us, they're going to lose and they're going to lose very, very quickly. Their chosen tactics right now are the improvised explosive devices that they plant on the roadways. Other tactics that we're seeing are suicide vests that they'll use, and a lot of these -- and also, I know you're very familiar with the vehicle-borne improvised explosive devices, but those tactics we're seeing more and more aimed at the Iraqi security forces vice the coalition forces. That's for, I think, for a couple reasons.

One, the success that the Iraqi security forces are having. The terrorists, the enemy that we're fighting here, they see that the tide is changing, that the support of the Iraqi people are coming over to the coalition force side, and the enemy are trying to use murder intimidation tactics and it's just not working against them. They won't -- the people of Iraq are standing up and they're fighting the terrorists, and it's good to see.

But the quick answer to your question is we're using less and less combined air-ground-type weapons and artillery and things like that. The environment here just doesn't require it.

Q If I could just ask a quick follow-up. Could you tell me with regard to the IED threat, do you guys MRAP vehicles on the scene there, a good number of them? And how effective have you found them to be?

COL. SIMCOCK: We do have a pretty good number of the MRAP vehicles here. We use them with some of our engineering and route-clearing units. They have been extremely successful for us. They're outstanding vehicles. We've got more inbound. They are a tremendous asset for us, and we look forward to more of them arriving.

Q Thanks very much, Colonel.

COL. SIMCOCK: Thank you.

MR. HOLT: Okay. Graham.

Q Good morning. This question --

COL. SIMCOCK: Good morning.

Q -- I promised the group of Marine wives I would ask you. They tell me that the Semper Fi Injured Marine Fund has had to lower its ceiling on grants and that the Marine Corps has had to cut back on the per diem they can give to families to fly out to be with injured Marines.

That being said -- and of course, we understand the reasons for that -- we would like to know what more we can do to help the regiment and the units keep in touch with their injured Marines, help them out and kind of serve as a bridge between the regiment, the injured Marine, his new unit and the family.

COL. SIMCOCK: I can't comment on the per diem being reduced as far as families being supported to come out and see their injured Marines. But I will tell you this -- my wife volunteers for the wounded Marines program. She's a certified public accountant by trade, and I know that she gets -- because she is the accountant, she takes care of the books. We get a tremendous amount of donations that are made to support this organization, obviously tax-deductible type donations, and it's been a very, very successful operation for us in supporting what needs to be done.

Now, I would just say, to get the information regarding your question, if you call Headquarters - Marine Corps Public Affairs, they can give you details on how family members or anyone interested in supporting this very, very successful program -- what they can do to help out in that regard.

Q Is there anything that you and your Marines need that we could send you?

COL. SIMCOCK: (Chuckles.) I'll tell you what, the one thing that all Marines want to know about -- and that includes me and everyone within Regimental Combat

Team 6 -- we want to know that the American public are behind us. We believe that the actions that we're taking over here are very, very important to America. We're fighting a group of people that, if they could, would take away the freedoms that America enjoys.

If anyone -- you know, just sit down, jot us -- throw us an e-mail, write us a letter, let us know that the American public are behind us. Because we watch the news just like everyone else. It's broadcast over here in our chow halls and the weight rooms, and we watch that stuff, and we're a little bit concerned sometimes that America really doesn't know what's going on over here, and we get sometimes concerns that the American public isn't behind us and doesn't see the importance of what's going on. So that's something I think that all Marines, soldiers and sailors would like to hear from back home, that in fact, yes, they think what we're doing over here is important and they are in fact behind us.

Q Thank you, Colonel.

MR. HOLT: All right, Dave.

Q Colonel Simcock, Dave Danelo from ON Point.

COL. SIMCOCK: Dave, good to hear from you. Haven't heard from you since our 1-7 days.

Q Good to hear from you, too, sir, and I can say I'm behind you. I wanted to ask -- both Andrew Lubin, a correspondent for ON Point, and myself have spent some time with Lieutenant Colonel Bill Jurney in Ramadi; 1-6 had a very successful experience, probably one of the most effective, in our observation. We wondered if you could tell us a little bit about some lessons learned that had been distilled throughout 6th Marines from the time in Ramadi.

COL. SIMCOCK: I will say this, that, you know, my area is obviously not Ramadi; however, 2nd Battalion, 6th Marines -- Lieutenant Colonel Bill Mullen, along with some of his staff, went over to Ramadi to talk with Lieutenant Colonel Bill Jurney in 1-6 and see what they had done over there that had been successful. Some of those lessons learned were brought back by 2-6 and currently are being implemented in Fallujah. We call it -- it's a district-type plan, similar to what they did in Ramadi, where we're breaking down Fallujah, we'll go into certain districts and establish neighborhood watches very, very similar to what they did in Ramadi, and we're finding that to be very, very successful.

We're still in the initial phases of that. But based on what we're seeing early, I think, we're going to have a lot of the same success that Bill Jurney had out there in Ramadi.

Q Thanks very much, sir.

COL. SIMCOCK: Appreciate it, good talking with you, Dave.

Q Good talking to you, too.

MR. HOLT: All right, we've got a few minutes left. Is there anybody with any follow-up questions?

Q Yeah, I do, if people don't -- unless somebody else -- Dave, you want to jump in quickly, or --

Q I have a couple, since I've got the time.

Q Okay.

Q Sir, I wondered what your observation was about the political shift in Anbar, as well. It's been stunning, because of the partnerships with the sheikhs and the tribal leaders. But what does that mean for the future of the Iraqi state, in your observation?

COL. SIMCOCK: Yeah, I would just say this, that you're absolutely right. There has been a huge change here in the last, oh, three, four months, politically, in the way that the average Iraqi here in our area are supporting us. I think that it's going to have a huge play in future elections that they hold here in Iraq.

I'm seeing -- I just say that from what I see on a day-to-day basis, how the people here in my area are very much interested in what's going on. They want to participate; they want a voice in their future. And I see that being -- just increasing in the months ahead, definitely a shift in their participation in the government that they elect. And also, I think, it's going to spill over to a national level.

Q Thanks, sir. Andrew or myself will look forward to getting out there soon and seeing that firsthand.

COL. SIMCOCK: Well, I tell you what. I encourage all of you, if you get the opportunity, to come out here and see for yourselves that things are definitely headed in the right direction. And I think you would be pleasantly surprised by what you saw.

Q Do we have time for another question, Jack?

MR. HOLT: Yeah, go ahead.

Q Okay, Colonel, Andrew Lubin again, working with Dave.

The provisional security forces, are they predominantly a Sunni rapid response force? Or people are saying, this is kind of like their own Sunni national guard. Or how would you actually describe them?

COL. SIMCOCK: I would classify them as a police reserve force. And I'll tell you that one thing out here, we're finding -- my -- I call my exit strategy the police forces. And the police here have been tremendous.

The problem that we have is, we only have limited police academies right now. We've currently got three, so we have a limited amount of recruits that we can put through the police academy and make police officers -- to make up for that, because there's not a shortage of volunteers for those that want to be policemen.

So what the Ministry of Interior has instituted is a provisional -- a provincial security force that are recruited under the same standards that we recruit the police, but they aren't full-fledged policemen. But they do work hand in hand in local areas, supporting the police. And hopefully when the -- there are open seats in the academies, these PSF can be then moved on, go through the academy and become full-fledged policemen.

Q Great. Thank you.

COL. SIMCOCK: You're welcome.

MR. HOLT: Okay, Colonel. Colonel Rich Simcock, commander, Regimental Combat Team Six in Fallujah, Iraq, thank you very much for joining us today. We appreciate you being with us, and hopefully we can do this again soon.

COL. SIMCOCK: I look forward to it and thank you very much for your time.

MR. HOLT: All right. Thank you, sir.

Q Thank you.

COL. SIMCOCK: Thank you.

Q Okay. Thanks, Colonel.

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